

Kingsport Cities of Service project draws on volunteers' expertise

Retirees Helping to Recruit Industry

Forty years ago, Clarence "Bunky" Seay joined a small but steady wave of engineers, chemists and scientists who moved their families to Kingsport to work in the region's growing manufacturing sector.

But in the years since Seay retired in 1999, many companies have cut production and eliminated positions, and many employees retired.

Now city officials are turning to retired industry pros like Seay, an engineer, to give them an inside track on recruiting new businesses and expanding existing ones.

"We want to mobilize retirees who have expertise in technical areas and have them draw on their experience to help us compete for relocating businesses," said Morris Baker, Kingsport's grants and government relations specialist. "It gives us just that little edge."

In February, Kingsport officials formally launched Impact Kingsport, an all-retiree volunteer economic development initiative.

Volunteer consultants

The project links highly skilled, highly educated retirees from Kingsport's plastics and chemical businesses, paper mills and other industrial companies with the city's economic development team to work as consultants.

Economic development officials work with a broad base of industries but don't always have a deep knowledge about the needs or challenges of a specific company or industry being recruited, Baker said.

But with a crop of volunteer consultants who have decades of experience, industry connections, skills and education in specialized areas such as plastics or chemicals, city

officials believe they can tap into an invaluable wealth of knowledge to recruit companies and recharge the city's economic base.

Kingsport is one of more than 100 cities that have joined the Cities of Service coalition, an ambitious national initiative founded in 2009 by a bipartisan group of 17 mayors to boost local volunteerism.

AARP has supported the coalition since its inception and has provided \$5,000 awards to help initiate local projects in nearly two dozen cities nationwide with populations under 125,000. Kingsport has about 50,000 residents.

AARP chose the Impact Kingsport project to support because of the large pool of retirees living there as well as the key support of city leaders, including Mayor Dennis Phillips, said Tara Shaver, associate state director for community outreach.

"A project like this doesn't go forward without the mayor's support," Shaver said.

Kingsport's Cities of Service project is different from most because of its focus on recruiting only a small number of highly educated and skilled volunteers. Other cities have created projects to mobilize large numbers of volunteers without specific skills.

Tremendous resources

Finding qualified volunteers to recruit won't be difficult, said Seay, who will serve as the project's volunteer chief service officer.

"We have tremendous resources to draw from," said Seay. In the past five years, more than 1,300 workers have retired from three of Kingsport's largest employers. Among them are about 200 who have a bachelor's degree or higher, according to research compiled in a 17-page project blueprint.

Seay, husband of Margot Seay, AARP Tennessee state president, will work closely with the Kingsport companies to create a database of retirees who are available to volunteer.

The project is getting under way as the state's job creation plan, Jobs4TN, launched by Gov. Bill Haslam (R), focuses on business recruitment and expansion efforts throughout Tennessee. The plastics and chemicals industries are key targets of those efforts.

With hundreds of collective years of experience in those industries to draw on, the Impact Kingsport retirees are well positioned to help drive industry growth.

—By Anita Wadhvani

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Tying The Knot

Weddings per 1,000 residents in each state and D.C. in 2010.

SOURCE: CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION, NATIONAL CENTER FOR HEALTH STATISTICS
*CALIFORNIA—MARRIAGE DATA INCLUDES NONLICENSED MARRIAGES REGISTERED.



Ala. 8.2	La. 6.9	Okl. 7.2
Alaska 8.0	Maine 7.1	Ore. 6.5
Ariz. 5.9	Md. 5.7	Pa. 5.3
Ark. 10.8	Mass. 5.6	R.I. 5.8
Calif. 5.8*	Mich. 5.5	S.C. 7.4
Colo. 6.9	Minn. 5.3	S.D. 7.3
Conn. 5.6	Miss. 4.9	Tenn. 8.8
Del. 5.2	Mo. 6.5	Texas 7.1
D.C. 7.6	Mont. 7.4	Utah 8.5
Fla. 7.3	Neb. 6.6	Vt. 9.3
Ga. 7.3	Nev. 38.3	Va. 6.8
Hawaii 17.6	N.H. 7.3	Wash. 6.0
Idaho 8.8	N.J. 5.1	W.Va. 6.7
Ill. 5.7	N.M. 7.7	Wis. 5.3
Ind. 6.3	N.Y. 6.5	Wyo. 7.6
Iowa 6.9	N.C. 6.6	
Kan. 6.4	N.D. 6.5	
Ky. 7.4	Ohio 5.8	